

The European Institutions and Roma Rights Advocacy: Understanding NGO-IO Partnerships through the Lens of Identity Theory

Luntumbue M. Valentin (College of Europe)

Abstract

Our paper will focus on the interactions between Roma rights INGOs like the Prague-based International Romani Union (IRU) or the Roma National Congress (RNC), and European International Organisations (IOs) through the lenses of social psychology.

Though they form an ensemble of drastically diverse groups, be it genetically or socio-culturally, Romani communities do share one common experience: that of oppression, disenfranchisement and discrimination. To this day, the Roma are Europe's most vulnerable minority group. In an international system where states have long predominated, and without a kin-state to advocate in their favour, Romani communities were long at a significant disadvantage.

The consolidation of supranational organisations and of a corpus of national minority rights in Europe (in particular in the context of the European Institutions' enlargements to Central and Eastern Europe) provided an window of opportunity for Roma rights INGOs to frame Roma not only as a migration-related, social problem but as potential rights recipients, on terms similar to national minorities. Activists resorted to several labels: ethnic minorities, landless nation, or transnational minority, stressing their pan-European identity, in order to attract the attention of IOs (an attention often refused at the national level), becoming some sort of "privileged customers" for European IOs, who often co-opt civil society organisations to uphold their disputed narratives of democratic legitimacy.

We will attempt to examine this NGO-IO relationship, through the lenses of identity studies concepts, such as "identity negotiation" and "identity salience", who tackle identity as the dynamic result of social interactions, substituting individuals with international actors.

The objective of our paper will be to draft that new theoretical framework, and try to apply it to the relationship between Roma NGOs and European institutions, how their interactions redefine or consolidate their respective identities and ultimately the very issues they take on. We argue that in the process of interacting, European institutions and Romani civil society influence each other's identity perception and with it their very *raison d'être* until reaching a consensus, that redefines how they frame Roma rights issues. This framing bearing both upsides and downsides – mostly that of being divorced from the local realities of Romani communities on the ground.

Points for Practitioners

Our paper's main take away for practitioners would be the notion that civil society organisation and institutional actors, when they cooperate, engage in an identity validation process, whose resulting consensus, if convenient for said parties, can end up redefining with the issue they seek to work together on. Be it the way it is problematized, framed... we tend to think that just like individuals, organisations influence each other's identity when they interact.

Keywords

Identity, International organisations, NGO, Civil Society, Minority rights, Roma rights, Social Psychology, Organisational theory, Identity theory, Transnational

Methodology

After superficially outlining the history of Roma rights advocacy and the Romani movement through qualitative document analysis, we interrogate its relationship with European institutions such as the European Union and the Council of Europe, through the lenses of Social Psychology concepts, ordinarily used to study interpersonal relations and symbolic interaction.

Due to some of interesting features and the way they portray identity as a dynamic reality, that is in part the result of social interaction, we attempt to extrapolate this concept to complement our identity-oriented approach to international actors.

List of Abbreviations

BJP - Bharatiya Janata Party

CEE – Central and Eastern Europe

COE – Council of Europe

CSCE – Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe

ERIO – European Roma Information Office

ERRC - European Roma Rights Centre

ERTF – European Roma and Traveller Forum

EU – European Union

FCNM – Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities

HCNM – High Commissioner on National Minorities

IO – International Organisation

IR – International Relations

IRU – International Romani Union

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

OSCE – Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe

OSI-RPP – Roma Participation Programme-Open Society

PHARE – Poland and Hungary Assistance for the Restructuring of the Economy

RNC – Roma National Congress

RSS – Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (National Volunteer Organization)

TACIS – Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States and Georgia

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

WRC – World Romani Congress

WRO – World Roma Organisation

1. Introduction

In this paper, we will take a look at the phenomenon by which Roma rights issues, pushed by minority rights promotion and advocacy NGOs, were progressively turned into a transnational issue, in order for it to be tackled by European international organisations, which found themselves ideal partners for NGOs claiming to represent a transnational European minority.¹ Our goal will be to look at this process using a paradigm taking into account the identity of these sets of international actors.

After an historical overview, during which we will recount how the framing of Roma issues evolved through the interaction between Romani civil society and European international organisations. We will attempt to examine this NGO-IO relationship and its evolution through the lenses of identity theory concepts, such as “identity negotiation” or “identity salience” who tackle identity as the dynamic result of social interactions, substituting individuals for international actors, crafting for the occasion a tailored model.

Should this model prove useful, it could help us refine the way we understand how the interactions and partnerships between IOs and NGOs can in turn reframe the issues they work on together. A process which, we argue, is not unlike a relationship of identity negotiation.

2. Theoretical Framework

Several elements can explain said dynamic of reframing, chiefly material and financial conditions. However, we would like to supplement existing analyses by bringing some elements from social psychology in order to explore how this process – that we identify as one of managing identity to maintain legitimacy – is also dependent on realities like the environment international actors find themselves in, as well as their relations and interactions. A dimension social psychology, through its field of Identity Theory, has studied in individuals, – and that could provide us with food for thought.

Identity theory’s greatest strength is to consider identity as something dynamic and as a performance, putting an emphasis on how roles an actor adopts within particular symbolic interactions, can develop into role-identities.² A perspective best encapsulated by the concept of identity salience, as developed by W.B. Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey³ and others, which truly takes into account the multiplicity of the self. According to the notion of identity salience, a person possesses a repertoire of several identities that they consciously switch between according to the situations they find themselves in, based on potential outcomes and stimuli – sort of masks they choose to wear in corresponding circumstances.⁴ Evidently, those identities are ranked in a hierarchy, with identities the individual is more committed to being more salient.⁵

Aside from not being a monolith, we also adhere to the idea that the formation of identity is dependent on social interactions, an idea developed by another Identity Theory concept: identity negotiation (most notably developed by W.B. Swann), or the notion that the knowledge of the self is derived from social interaction, that

¹ Such as the International Romani Union, of which we will be talking soon, an organisation which hosts a Romani Parliament and issues (unrecognised) Romani passports, whose president declared the Roma to be a nation in 2001. Organiser of the Romani World Congresses, it enjoys observer status at the Council of Europe and the UN.

² Morris, R.C., 2013, Identity Salience and Identity importance in Identity Theory. *Current Research in Social Psychology*, 23-36.

³ Gudykunst, W. B., and Ting-Toomey, Stella, 1990, Ethnic identity, language and communication breakdowns, in: *Handbook of language and social psychology*, edited by H. Giles & W. P. Robinson, Chichester, Wiley.

⁴ Stryker, Sheldon, 1968, Identity Salience and Role Performance. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 4/4: 558–564.

⁵ Morris, R.C., *op.cit.*

identity is a consensus between what we think of ourselves and the stimuli we receive back from our interlocutors. Identity negotiation postulates that the internal consensus on one's identity is the result of a dialectical reconciliation between two actors, the perceiver and the target. Through social interaction, the perceiver can provide self-verification to how the target chooses to present their identity, or inversely invalidate the target's presentation with their vision clashing. When their expectations clash, both try to persuade each other to make concessions on their competing vision until a consensus is reached. Research seems also to point that when a perceiver, by his behaviour, confirms a target's self-views, said target is likely to confirm the perceiver's own self-views in return, especially if the target's are particularly consolidated.⁶

In this framework, the search for self-validation might push actors to look for "opportunity structures" where they are more likely to engage in a relationship that will provide said self-validation. Through identity negotiation, actors also look to fulfil particular goals in order to meet needs such as: *coherence* (sense that the world fits with past experiences, having expectations met), *connectedness* (positive relations with valued others) and *agency* (sense of competence, specific to an organisational setting).⁷

Identity can thus be understood as malleable and dynamic, multifaceted and negotiable, and as the result of a relational process that also fulfils adjacent needs. Extrapolating this type of approach to the international system would entail taking into account the particular case of organisational identity as well as potentially redefine the set of adjacent goals. We would link the former to the organisation's *raison d'être* and introduce *legitimacy* to the latter.

We thus tend to think we could slightly modify this model to better adapt to an IR setting a model developed to fit individuals and their behaviours, by adding into the equation the question of legitimacy, organically tied to Swann's three goals of coherence, connectedness and agency. If those are not mere ends but also shape the form the negation takes,⁸ the quest for legitimacy (which allows for an organisation very self-preservation as well as its ability to see its will enforced without coercion) should be considered at least at the same level of relevance.

3. Methods and shortcomings

This paper (in particular its more historical parts) is derived from a thesis presented in 2017 at the College of Europe, itself the result of an extensive qualitative document analysis. Our aim is to complement the main claim of said thesis, that the current framing of the Roma as a transnational minority or a European minority was the result of the interaction between two set of actors: Roma rights NGOs often linked to the Romani national movement, and European international organisations looking to invest the field of minority rights.

Our model, inspired by identity theory, will try to understand this relationship as one of identity negotiation and mutual self-validation, and the subsequent reframing of Roma rights issues as the result of a new consensus reached through that process. However, as our model is still a work in progress, it is evidently not exempt of significant flaws.

Among the shortcomings of our initial model, we can point at the "black box" approach to international actors, that fail to take into account the internal dynamics of organisations. One could say nonetheless that reinforcing identity of an organisation, also strengthen its internal structural consensus, its cohesion which could be taken into the equation. Actually, it could feature among relationship goals, that we should modify to fit our setting.

⁶ Swann William B. Jr, Johnson Russell E. and Bosson Jennifer K., 2009, Identity negotiation at work, *Research in Organizational Behaviour*, 13: 1-29.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

Our best bet would be to draw more from organisational theory, and, for example, introduce goals of self-reproduction or cohesion into the model as we hinted earlier.

Tied to that “black box” issue, is that we leave aside internal dimensions of identity formation. Organisations are not individuals, and if we have some knowledge of how the internal construction of identities takes place before said identities being presented, these mechanisms are not as easily transposable to the international systems.

Ultimately, to really strengthen our model would require to applying similar methodology to other IO-NGO relationships centred around different set of issues. We tend to think the field of environmental activism could be a relevant testing ground, as environmental NGOs have also often taken their activism to the international level.⁹

4. A History of exclusion

Those we today call the Roma we born out of a process called the *Balkan Migrations*. Emerging from a crumbling Byzantium and a troubled Anatolia in the late 14th century, a series of related semi-nomadic groups spread all across Europe, reaching its every corners by the end of the 15th – and even beyond, as four Roma sailors embarked with Christopher Columbus on its 1498 voyage to the Americas.¹⁰

In a booming Europe characterised by steady growth and meagre labour supply, dynamically recovering from the horrors of the Black Death a few decades earlier, the Roma initially found welcoming markets for the services they provided. Their mobility allowed them to offer competitive specialised services to European communities, working as craftsmen, traders, horse-breeders, circus artists... usually activities financially less sustainable for sedentary workers.¹¹

They were known by many names across the continent, often exonyms: *Kalé* or *Gitanos* in Spain and Southern France, *Gypsies* or *Travellers* in the British Isles, *Sinti* or *Manush* in Western Europe, *Zingari* in Italy, *Tsigani* in Romania... As long as they were needed for their contribution, they were allowed to roam free, unfortunately, that situation didn't last. Starting from around the 17th century, increasingly repressive legislation was passed all around Europe¹². While they were forcibly expelled from the island of Great Britain, in France they were sentenced to the galleys and deported to the Americas. In 1710 they were banished from Prague, in their former safe-haven of Bohemia. In 1749, all of Spain's Gypsies were rounded up and imprisoned in internment camps.¹³ In Habsburg lands, they were forced by law to assimilate through coerced marriage with non-Roma. In the Danubian Principalities (modern-day Romania), where Roma were systematically enslaved as early as the 14th century, a particularly cruel system of chattel slavery survived well into the 19th century.¹⁴

Though Romani communities are incredibly diverse socially, culturally, linguistically or even genetically¹⁵ and they should not be understood as a monolith, there is a constant in their experience across time and space: that of exclusion, subjugation and perpetual othering by the *gadjo* – the non-Roma and their society. This history of

⁹ Park, Susan, 2013, Transnational Environmental Activism, in: *The Handbook of Global Climate and Environment Policy*, First Edition, edited by Robert Falkner, Chichester, Wiley.

¹⁰ Liégeois, Jean-Pierre, 2009, *Roms et Tsiganes*, Paris, La Découverte, coll. « Repères ».

¹¹ Warnke, Adam M., 1999, Vagabonds, Tinkers, and Travelers: Statelessness among the East European Roma. *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies*, 7/1: 335-367.

¹² Liégeois, Jean-Pierre, 2005, Les Roms au cœur de l'Europe. *Le Courrier des Pays de l'Est*, 6/1052 : 21-22.

¹³ Gómez Alfaro, Antonio, *The Great “Gypsy” round-up in Spain*. Also available online: http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/roma/Source/FS2/3.3_roundup-spain_english.pdf

¹⁴ Fonseca, Isabel, 1995, *Bury Me Standing*, New York, Random House.

¹⁵ Ioviță, Radu P. and Schurr Theodore G., 2004, Reconstructing the Origins and Migrations of Diasporic Populations: The Case of the European Gypsies, *American Anthropologist*, 106/2: 267-281,

persecution culminated with the genocide they suffered at the hands of the Nazis and their collaborators, which killed between 500,000 and 1.5 million Roma.¹⁶

5. Framing Roma issues, from *Landless Nationalism to Transnationalisation*

From the late 19th century onwards, Romani intellectual elites across Europe gave birth to a small series of emerging local national movements, emulating other European nationalisms, most notably Zionism – for obvious reasons. Somewhat linked to the cultural revival of Bulgaria's Turkish minority, Bulgarian Roma were particularly active in the early 20th century. In Romania, a consolidated Romani Union progressively sees the day in the 1920s-1930s followed by a Panhellenic Tziganes Association in 1939. In Russia and Belarus, a similar national movement was also active but tightly controlled by the state up until Stalin's changes to the nationalities policies.¹⁷

If the Second World War put that dynamic on hold, as Romani elites were often the primary victims of Nazi Germany's genocidal policies, the Romani movement gained steam after the war, particularly in the 1960s. Roma across Europe had organised and gave birth to local movements, built networks and national associations, but it is in the 1960s that they started to organise internationally. In 1967 suburban Paris, a group of activists created the *Comité international tsigane*, which quickly becomes a link between different national organisations and ended up turning into an international federation in 1972 – gathering 23 organisations from 22 states. This committee went on to organise the First World Romani Congress in Orpington, near London, in April 1971, an event financed by the Indian government and the World Council of Churches, that attracted 23 delegates from 14 countries. It is during that First Congress that the green and blue flag adorned with a red chakra was adopted as a national flag, *Gelem Gelem* a national anthem and that the name *Rrom* (plural *Rroma*), meaning “man” in Romani, was adopted as an endonymic appellation destined to supplant *Gypsy* or *Tzigane*, and act as catch-all term for all Romani communities. In 1978, during the Second World Romani Congress in Geneva, the International Romani Committee officially became the International Romani Union (IRU), before being awarded consultative status by the UN Economic and Social Council and the Council of Europe shortly after.¹⁸ During its Fifth Congress in 2000, Emil Ščuka, founder of the Prague-based Roma Civic Initiative, allied of Václav Havel's Civil Forum during the Gentle Revolution, and newly elected president of the IRU pushed forward *The Declaration of Nation*, that claimed the Roma were “a non-territorial nation.”¹⁹

The IRU is a particular case. Based in Prague, it has three bodies: the Presidium, the Parliament (with dedicated working groups) and a Court of Justice. And if it is prominent, it is far from the only organisation trying to give a voice to the Roma on the international stage. Almost equally important is the Hamburg-based Roma National Congress (RNC) started as an umbrella organisation representing the interests of German Sinti, distinct from those of Romani immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), and focused on fully representing Roma as right-bearing individuals.²⁰ Let us also add transnational advocacy organisations such as the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) based in Budapest and created in 1996, or the Brussels-based European Roma Information Office (ERIO), founded in 2003, as well as the Roma Participation Programme of the Open Society Institute (OSI-RPP) which funds local Romani NGOs, provides grants and training.²¹

¹⁶ Asséo, Henriette, 1993, Contrepoint : la question tsigane dans les camps allemands, *Annales. Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 48/3 : 567-582.

¹⁷ Liégeois, Jean-Pierre, *Roms et Tziganes*, *op.cit.*

¹⁸ Idem, *Les Roms au cœur de l'Europe*, *op.cit.*

¹⁹ *The Declaration of Nation* is available online: <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/60/132.html>

²⁰ McGarry, Aidan, 2008, Ethnic Group Identity and the Roma Social Movement: Transnational Organizing Structures of Representation. *Nationalities Papers*, 36/3: 449-470.

²¹ Schnellbach Christoph, 2012, The Role of NGOs in Promoting Minority Rights in the Enlarged European Union. *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, 13/4: 497-512.

The emergence of a transnational network of Roma rights advocacy and representation was accompanied by a subsequent homogenisation of sorts. Though the experience of a French *Manouche* can differ drastically from that of Romanian *Vlax*, all these groups found themselves lumped into the umbrella term *Roma*. This downside derived from the necessity for Roma advocacy group to escape the national level to join forces on the international level, and it is easy to guess why. In an international system still dominated by states, where self-determination is as tied to the soil as it is to its people, Roma people have no kin-state of their own to advocate on their behalf, nor a region where they can claim they are in majority. On the contrary, states constantly failed to positively address Roma issues, or treat them as anything more than a social problem to be resolved or worse yet, a nuisance.²²

Trying to escape or challenge that state-centred framework, Roma rights NGOs alternatively referred to Romani communities as a non-territorial nation (as the IRU did in its declaration), a stateless national minority, a transnational minority, an ethnic minority, or variants of these labels, as a minority rights legal framework emerged at the international level in the second part of the 20th century. In parallel, some have suggested making of the Roma a national minority of the Republic of India, such as the Belgrade-based World Roma Organization (WRO – Rromanipen), as it is commonly accepted that the ancestors of the European Roma were originally from Northern India (Rajasthan, Punjab). Such propositions were subtly encouraged by Narendra Modi's BJP-led government, most notably during the February 2016 International Roma Conference and Culture Festival in New Delhi, where all Indian speakers were members of the ARSP, an overseas subsidiary of the National Volunteer Organization (RSS) the nationalist paramilitary group that consequently happen to also be the parent organisation of Narendra Modi's BJP.²³

However, since the fall of the Berlin Wall, for several reasons, the transnational route had consistently seemed the most promising. On the one hand, minority rights reappeared on top of the European agenda, just as supranational structures like the European Union and the OSCE found themselves re-energised in the wake of the approaching enlargement. On the other hand, most Central and Eastern European countries recovering their independence renewed at the same time with a reinforced sense of nationalism. Already precarious under communist states forcing them to assimilate, the situation of Roma went worse. Most infamously, after the Velvet Divorce, the Romani citizens of Czechoslovakia found themselves stateless.²⁴

6. The Enlargement: A window of opportunity

It is true that way before the enlargement, the Council of Europe had been interested in the case of the Roma. The organisation, perceiving the national minority question as a matter of soft security, developed over time a robust corpus of minority rights-related texts, including a Recommendation on the *Situation of Gypsies and other travellers in Europe* as early as 1969.²⁵

However, in the 1990s, the combined fear of the eruption of ethnic conflicts in Central and Eastern Europe, and the need to foster human rights governance reform in the countries promised to eventually join Western regional integration structures, helped putting minority rights issues back on the agenda – for good.

In 1994, the Council of Europe established the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM). The CSCE appointed a High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) in 1992, who was encouraged to tackle Roma rights issues the next year. Its main concern was originally migration, as

²² Asséo, Henriette, *op.cit.*

²³ Ramachandran, Smriti Kak, 2016. "India should declare Roma as a national minority of Indian origin". *Hindustan Times*. Also available online: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india/india-should-declare-romas-as-national-minority-of-indian-origin/story-xlQJRtOLtStUqId652QOnJ.html>

²⁴ Warnke, Adam M., *op.cit.*

²⁵ Parliamentary Assembly, 1969, *Recommendation 563*. Also available online: <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-EN.asp?fileid=14599&lang=en>

Western states, afraid of a massive wave of Romani migrants moving westward to escape discrimination, persecution and a lack of opportunities, put pressure on the office of the High Commissioner to prevent it by improving their conditions in their home countries.²⁶

The European Union (EU), that first had adopted a resolution relative to Roma issues in 1989, also came to tackle minority rights in the early 1990s in order to facilitate as peacefully as possible its “Big Bang” enlargement eastward. While it had long relied on other organisations’ (chiefly the Council of Europe) frameworks, it decided to include minority rights in the 1993 Copenhagen criteria, though it still lacked proper standards of its own. Through parts of such programmes as TACIS and PHARE, the EU ensured to address the Roma’s socio-economic exclusion in CEE countries as a way to prevent their feared migration, without putting in place hard barriers to free movement.²⁷ Under the influence of the Council of Europe and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) – future Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) as of 1995 –, the EU had linked the issue of minority rights, and by extent Roma rights, to membership and made it a part of its core values. Originally understood as a matter related to security, Roma issues drifted to become part of a set of common values championed by European institutions, giving Roma NGOs new ground to argue on. Since 2005, the Council of Europe even harbours under its aegis the European Roma and Traveller Forum (ERTF) a consultative assembly of delegates hailed from Romani civil society with privileged access to Strasbourg’s policy makers.²⁸

Furthermore, at the turn of the Millennium, Romani communities started to be referred, in official texts, as a *European Minority*.²⁹ After the 2004 and 2007 enlargements, the population of Roma in the EU jumped from 1-2 million to between 8 and 12 million.

EU policies directed at the Roma were originally top-down oriented, but evolved in the 2000s to progressively include different actors besides member states, leading to the European Commission joining as observer (from the beginning and along other EU institutions) of the First Decade on Roma Inclusion (2005-2015) whose non-state partners included the World Bank, the Open Society Foundations, the Council of Europe and its development bank, the OSCE, as well as the ERIO, the ERTF, the ERRC, and several UN institutions (UNDP, UNHCR, UN-Habitat, UNICEF).³⁰ In the timespan of the Decade, 28 meetings between Romani civil society and international institutions took place, and in April 2011, the EU Commission adopted a Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020,³¹ who insisted they should include an *active dialogue with the Roma*.³² Let us point out that, however, this renewed approach still failed to engage with local Romani communities or to fundamentally treat them as more than a monolith.

²⁶ Guglielmo, Rachel and Waters Timothy William, 2005, Migrating Towards Minority Status: Shifting European Policy Towards Roma. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 43/4: 763-786.

²⁷ *Ibid.* and Guglielmo Rachel, 2004, Human Rights in the Accession Process: Roma and Muslims in an Enlarging EU, in: *Minority Protection and the Enlarged European Union: The Way Forward*, edited by Gabriel N. Toggenburg, Budapest, Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative/Open Society Institute.

²⁸ *Partnership Agreement between the Council of Europe and the European Roma and Travellers Forum*, 14 April 2010. Available online : <https://www.ertf.org/index.php/documents/partnership-agreement>

²⁹ European Parliament, 2005, *Resolution on the situation of the Roma in the European Union*, P6_TA(2005)0151. Also available online: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2005-0151+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

³⁰ Brüggemann, Christian and Friedman Eben, 2017, The Decade of Roma Inclusion: Origins, Actors, and Legacies. *European Education*, 49: 1-9.

³¹ European Commission, 2011, *An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020*, COM(2011) 173, Also available online: <http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2011:0173:FIN:EN:PDF>

³² Vermeersch, Peter, 2014, The EU and the Roma: An Analysis of Recent Institutional and Policy Developments, in: *Minority Governance in and Beyond Europe, Celebrating 10 Years of the European Yearbook of Minority Issues*, edited by Tove H. Malloy and Joseph Marko, Brill/Nijhoff, Leiden-Boston.

During the enlargements, hard and soft security concerns led to a progressive drift of minority rights issues to a partially supranational level as the topic, and Roma rights in particular, was seized by European institutions. That reality provided a new promising opportunity lane for advocacy groups. On the other hand, along a precursor – the Council of Europe for which the Roma were a privileged customer – other international actors, like the European Union with its vastly larger capabilities, joined in taking on the complex transnational issue that is Roma rights. We argue such a move is guided by a certain kind of rational interest, one that is tied to the organisation's core values, or its *identity* from which it derives its legitimacy.

7. The identity dimension of international organisations

In the favourable context of the enlargement, Roma rights advocates and Roma representation groups found the opportunity of a fruitful partnership by taking their advocacy to the supranational level, a move facilitated by the transnational nature of Roma issues (as heterogeneous as they are, the oppression most Romani groups experience share some common features) as well as the shortcomings of the states in addressing them, when they were not hindering their advances.

We argue this relationship was sort of a two-way street, as a transnational issue such as Roma rights, forsaken by European nation states allowed European institutions to flex their muscles and make themselves relevant on the international stage, occupying a lane that was left largely untapped.

Organisation such as the Council of Europe or the EU, whose *raison d'être* are rooted in democratic principles, often correct their perceived democratic deficit by co-opting civil society organisations, understood as a component of liberal democratic governance.³³ In this regard, it is no surprise an international NGO dedicated to the representation of Romani people such as the IRU was offered preferential status.

We think realities linked to their identity – as their *raison d'être* – are amongst what can cement that relationship between international organisations and civil society organisations. If identity is a concept sometimes used in international organisation theory, it is seldom defined, but often linked to an organisation's values, the reason they were set up, their function their political narrative, and understood as a variable directly influencing their legitimacy. Meaning, the better they embody (or present) their identity, the more legitimacy they draw from it. Indirectly, identity is thus tied to an organisation's capacity to see its will respected and enforced. Additionally, organisational theories have stressed how organisations tend to seek to reproduce themselves. They likewise point at how in order to do so look for forms of legitimisation when their original *raison d'être* disappears, such as NATO reinventing its identity as a community of democracies after the Soviet Union withered out.³⁴ Identity should therefore not be conceived as fixed – but rather as dependent on its environment.

8. Identity theory applied to international actors

Let's us apply our framework by considering an identity negotiation relationship with at one end Roma advocacy groups and the European institutions at the other end. The identities of both actors are subjects to debate. The legitimacy of Roma rights group is often disputed by their own supposed base, Roma communities on the ground that they claim to represent. Furthermore, they conduct their advocacy using unifying labels for European Romani people giving out the impression they are to be treated as homogeneous group. Not just for the sake of simplification but also to appeal to international organisations by emphasising the transnational nature of a supposed Roma people. On their end, European institutions (chiefly, Council of Europe and

³³ Schnellbach, Christoph, *op.cit.*. See also Charrad, Kristina, 2010, *Participant or Observers in European Governance? Civil society lobbyist from Central and Eastern Europe in Brussels*, Baden-Baden, Nomos.

³⁴ Sjursen, Helene, 2004, On the identity of NATO. *International Affairs*, 80/4: 687-703.

European Union) suffer from perceived democratic deficit and the necessity to cement their identity as communities based on democratic principles and human rights promoters. The EU in particular also battles with its identity as a supranational or intergovernmental organisation.³⁵

This relationship potentially provides both actors with potential benefits. As they mutually validate each other's identity, they increase their legitimacy in the process. But first they needed an opportunity structure, provided by the Romani national movement who "transnationalised" Roma rights issues in order to bypass states.³⁶ Amongst their repertoire of identities, the narrative of Roma as a transnational European minority was promoted, which permitted easier interaction with institutions active on a transnational plane, when both group of actors met the most fruitfully, during the enlargement period and its aftermath.

European institutions adhering to the idea that Roma were some quintessential transnational Europeans, and that Romani NGOs were their proper representatives granted the latest validation, while said Roma rights advocates validated European institutions in return, by recognising them as their most viable option for human rights promotion, and a proper supranational referential authority for a transnational people. On the part of European institutions, taking on Roma rights filled a need for coherence, allowing for the organisations to act in line with their assumed common values, reducing some sort of cognitive dissonance between their avowed mission and their praxis. It allowed both end of the relationship to cultivate their identities through their interaction. It has also allowed them to be active and relevant in this specific field that involves several types of third actors, granting them valuable agency. Most of all, it reinforced the involved group of actors' identities both ways, and, per extension, granting them legitimacy, as their identity solidified.³⁷

Nevertheless, resorting to identity theory in the context of Roma rights allow us to better understand some of the shortcomings of the partnership between NGOs and institutions. The consensus emerging from the negotiation process is a preferred set of tweaked role-identities for the NGOs, that are clearly the minor partner in the relationship, leading to a drift from their original *raison d'être*. Concepts like "transnational minority" or "European minority" are a consensual term that both allow the two groups of actor to cooperate together and a result of their interaction.³⁸ However useful, they fail to reflect the sheer diversity amongst Romani communities and the need for very local inclusion-oriented policies directed at local populations, rather than grand strategies on a European scale addressing an imaginary homogeneous Roma people. Furthermore, some researchers such as Université d'Angers' Samuel Delépine have suggested that this changed transnational and homogeneous framing can problematically misrepresent and essentialise the exclusion the Roma experience on the European continent, and present them as some sort of exceptional transnational social problem, reminiscent of their national treatments in the past – some sort of new European-scaled "Roma question".³⁹

This consensus doesn't only have downsides though. Roma NGOs secured the attention of a major standard setter, and anchored Roma issues within the plane of minority rights issues and inclusion, making them potential right-bearers more than the root of social ills, or a migratory threat to be canalised. They also secured some legitimacy for themselves in the process. Needless to say, an organisation like the IRU's consultative status granted by the Council of Europe and the UN Economic and Social Council is a major source of legitimacy for the NGO, and one robust tool of validation. European institutions in return saw their status as human rights promoters reinforced by the interaction, as they were preferentially chosen as partners by this transnational minority.⁴⁰

For better or for worse, as they validate each other's narratives, the identity of both groups of actors evolved, and so did their framing of Roma rights issues, in order to reach a necessary working consensus. We

³⁵ Krase, Jackson, 2017, The European Union: Supranational or Intergovernmental? *Medium*, July 2017. Also available online: <https://medium.com/@jskrase/the-european-union-supranational-or-intergovernmental-7980f7b5b4a1>

³⁶ McGarry, Aidan, 2011, The Roma voice in the European Union: Between National Belonging and Transnational Minority. *Social Movement Studies*, 10/3: 283-297.

³⁷ Swann William B. Jr, Johnson Russell E. and Bosson Jennifer K., *op.cit.*

³⁸ Canut, Cécile, 2011, La lange romani : une fiction historique. *Langage et Société*, 2/136: 55-80.

³⁹ Delépine, Samuel, 2012, *Atlas des Tsiganes. Les dessous de la question rom*, Paris, Editions Autrement.

⁴⁰ McGarry, Aidan, *op.cit.*

argue this framing is the result of an identity negotiation-like process and find the idea of using similar paradigm to study the relations between IOs (or maybe other international actors such as states proper) and civil society organisations promising, although a modified model would better suit such a different context.

9. Conclusion

Our initial model brings a couple of constructive perspectives to be considered and built upon. It is already commonly accepted that identities are not fixed nor monolithic, and this extends to international actors, whose identities and the changes they go through have been studied. We claim that looking at identity formation as the result of interaction and relationships between actors can further enrich that outlook. Additionally, we claim that as each end of the relationship we have studied – IOs and their NGO partners – reinforce or adapt their identities, they in turn redefine the very issues they tackle together in the process.

In any case, we hope this incursion of identity theory concepts into an international relations frame can lay the foundation for further experiments on the symbolic interactions of international actors. Our model certainly has its shortcomings, it is true, notably the fact that it treats international actors as a black box. We could consider the importance of identity coherence when it comes to an international actor's internal group cohesion, and how the identity reflects on an organisations' components, be it personnel or internal organs. While it would allow us to not look at organisation as black box, it would unfortunately extend beyond the scope of this modest paper. We doubt however that including an internal analysis of how consensus is reached within an international actors would necessarily invalidate it.

We certainly hope to further complement our framework by including an internal dimension to it in the future. Furthermore, the adjacent goals to be included into the framework haven't been settled either, but as to fit organisations, it is certain the concept of legitimacy should play a prominent role. We hope to improve on that front too. Ultimately though, as we hinted earlier, its true test would be to see if it stands when applied to similar relationships between international actors in other policy areas.